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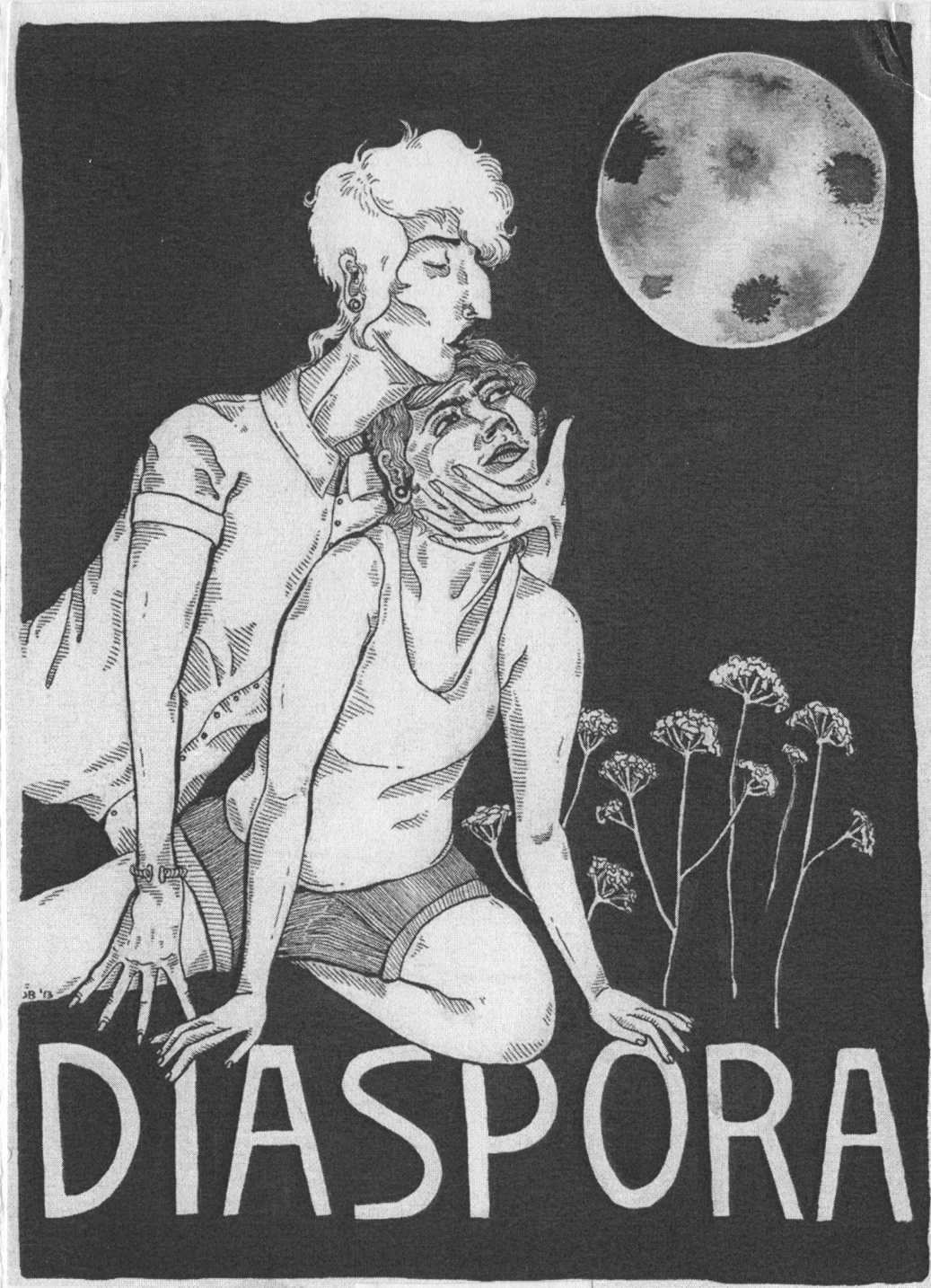

Doykeit #2

The concept of "doykeit"--Yiddish for "hereness"--is taken from the pre-World War II Polish-Jewish group the Bund, which believed that Jews have both a right to live and a political commitment to work for change "here and now."

This issue, though perhaps no more or less than the previous one, deals with the idea of diaspora, of dispersion, of galut (exile) and the fr## fraught concept of home(land).

This zine is limited in many ways, in the voices and deabtes it captures and those it doesn't. And yet these pieces assembled and read together will labor together, will produce different experiences for different readers.

Sit in the contradictions, understand the absences (withou#t excusing them) and maybe, join# the conversation. The theme of the next issue will be dybbuks, traces, hauntings, possession, loss, time travel, memory, ghosts.

Send submissions to sassyfrasscircus@gmail.com
We will accept submissions until we get enough.

"The word 'diaspora' means dispersion. It originated in the Septuagint, one of the original Greek translations of the Bible: Deuteronomy 28:25: 'thou shalt be a diaspora in all kingdoms of the earth.'..."

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heteronormativity or homonormativity? How to have a relationship that progresses but that eschews and dismantles progressive notions of what a relationship is meant to be?

5. The notion of 'futurity', that so many queer writers are taking up at this particular political and culture moment, asks us—in my reading of it—to imagine futures that are new, or to imagine a new formulation of the future. This is an important challenge for those of us who are diasporists too, I think.

6. I like that when one talks about Israel/Palestine and what is going on in that space and what will happen in the future in that space, there are no terms that divide people into clear groups. There are Jews whose families pre-date the creation of the State of Israel, and who thus could be Palestinians; there are Muslim and Christian Palestinians living in the current State of Israel, and who thus could be Israeli. There are Jews from throughout the Middle East who are thus Arabs. And there are children born to parents whose background makes them Palestinian, Israeli, Christian, Muslim and Jewish. The terms cannot clearly encompass everyone they are intended to; the groups are excessive of the boundaries that some attempt to impose. Space and temporality are mixed-up.

7. Resistance to the hegemony of the normative, to the demand placed on us to reproduce the family and the state, can be imagined through queer diasporism. I don't know what these resistances produce, exactly, but I think that openness, that potentiality, that not-knowing, but always thinking and creating, is the point.

8. Sometimes I think that there's no more joyful a space than being at a jewish music event, catching the eye of someone cute across the room, and smiling as you realise that they're checking you out too.

9. then I remember the many more joyful spaces of diasporism: the making connections with someone across the world, online and then in person, realising you have found an ally and a friend; the first time reading of the writings of someone like Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz, or Ella Shohat, or Ammiel Alcalay, or Jon Stratton, and having your mind-bended, your patterns of thinking re-arranged. it's a joy to remember that the most creative, exciting forms of jewishnesses exceed and explode the boundaries of any nation-state.

Queer Diasporist Futurity

Jordy Silverstein

1. It's important to have hope, I think. Hope works as a useful animating principle, a way to think positively about the future. It's hard to live day to day when there's a feeling of no hope. But as well as living, it's difficult to imagine a future that is worth being a part of, if one has no hope.

This question of imagining a future, and working towards a future, though, seems to me to be incredibly fraught. Futures are so often spoken of, and imagined, as being produced through biological reproduction and nation-state continuation. The future is imagined—by the agents of capitalism, the patriarchy, and heteronormativity (which are, in truth, all of us at different moments)—as one in which little of substance is changed, but in which there is unending, unyielding, damaging, 'growth'.

A challenge for those of us who choose to sit in some way outside of the normativity produced by the repeated utterances of those ideas, then, is how to think a future that doesn't rely on those norms.

2. There is a dance that young diasporist, non- or anti-Zionist Jews do, when we meet each other. Or maybe it's just a dance that I've found myself doing with others, that I've then imagined happens for others I haven't yet met as well. We meet, we talk, we try to make a connection. If we want to be cautious, we say gentle phrases to hint at the possibility that we might not be comfortable with what Israel does, with what Israel is. If we're feeling more adventurous, we'll be more explicit with our words. And we wait to see if we have met someone who thinks somewhat alike. If we have met a partner, someone with whom we can build new ideas and share new imaginings. If we have thought wrongly, and don't feel like a fight (because the fight with Zionists and with Zionism can be so exhausting), we back away slowly.

3. Does numbering these thoughts produce them as unfolding, one after the other? Can numbering be made non-chronological, even if it is written in chronological order?

4. It's somewhat the same in finding a new lover. How to join in a partnership with someone, one which will change and morph and grow and be filled with greatness; one which will challenge and provoke and be filled with genuine respect and care (rather than the mere words, which (attempt to) cover over so much awfulness, that so many of these encounters are filled with) that is not at the same time imbued with

Lecha Dodi

Clara Bee Lavery

I hate telling people I'm a convert.

Outwardly, I pass quite easily as an Ashkenazi Jew, so it's not immediately obvious. I have a surname that is often mistaken for a variation of a Levite designation. My Hebrew comprehension is pretty good. I chant Haftorah in front of my congregation. I have Jewish family - my elder sister, whose conversion strangely and intricately moved me to my own, is a *soferet* who will be ordained as a rabbi this autumn. I go to shul most Saturday mornings, and I observe the sabbath every week.

Then there's my appearance, which is regularly read as Jewish. I'm a white lady with frizzy, curly hair and a large hooked nose, which other Jews routinely and lovingly tease me about, identifying it as a"Jewish nose". It *is* a Jewish nose, because it is mine, and I'm a Jew – but it isn't part of a genetic legacy passed down to me from Polish or Czech or even Lithuanian grandparents. Rather, my bloodlines lead to Italy and Malta on my mother's side; to Northern Ireland and Malta on my father's.

That's always how the truth spills out: My parents.

"Wait, so your mom's first language is Italian?"
"Yes," I say, my cheeks burning.
"And your dad..."
It gets too unbearable to listen to them work out my unlikely genetics.
"And my dad's from Ireland. I'm a convert. I converted."
"But your sister -"
"Is also a convert."

The light of recognition in their eyes goes out. Their smile becomes awkward, uneasy. Whatever picture that existed in their mind of our DNA beautifully entwined, sprawling across generations and ancestors, stretching back to a desert wandered for forty years, is suddenly, swiftly excised. Even as I type this, I am girding my metaphorical loins, bracing myself for you, reader, to dismiss me as a sad and weird Goy all too desperate to assert her place in the Tribe.

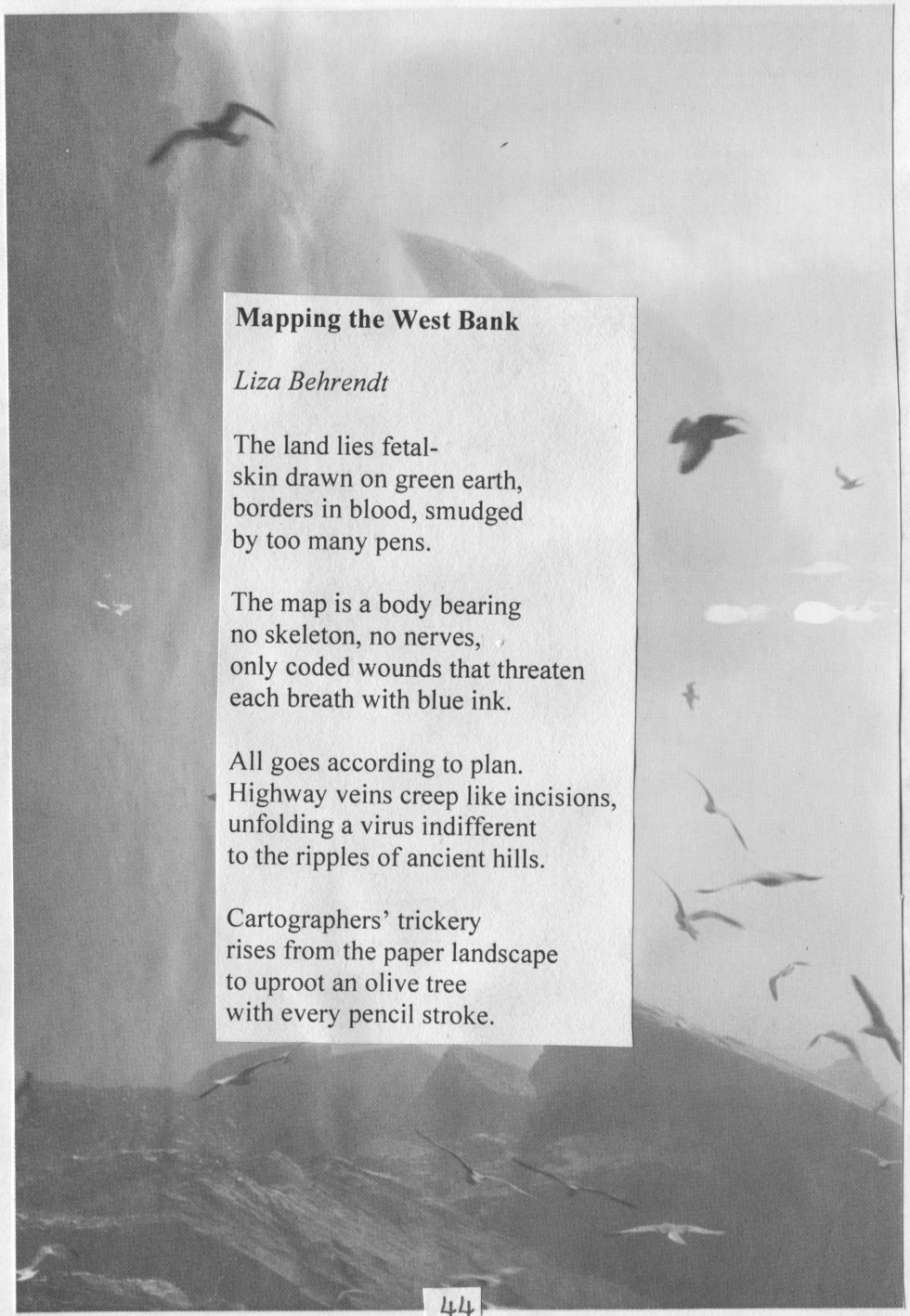
The Talmud[1] tells us that every Jewish soul – past, present, and future – stood at Mount Sinai to hear the ten commandments (this is why we stand during the recitation of *Asseret Ha-Dibrot*, which doubtless many of you learned in Hebrew school). Even the soul of a *Ger Tzedek,* the "righteous proselyte" is included in this concept. As much as it may sound like an unsuccessful attempt at photoshopping myself into the dramatic finale of *The Prince of Egypt*, this tractate really speaks to me. Insofar as I think there are souls, I feel certain that mine has always been a Jewish one. I filled the gaps with years of study – with the alephbet, with learning Torah *b'chavruta*, with the melodic rises and falls of cantorial tropes, with the smell of fresh challah, with the pounding of my fist against my chest on Yom Kippur. And when I emerged from the *mikvah,* sputtering and glowing with pride, not bothering to self-consciously hide my naked body as my Rabbi rushed over to embrace me, *all* of me was Jewish.

But this doesn't necessarily help me. For many Jews in my demographic (mid-twenties, anarcho and/or leftist politics), the only significant relationship they have to Judaism is their ethnic identity. Souls and the Talmud and the ten commandments are often considered irrelevant or offensive. In this scenario, I lack the only thing that could make me a Jew in their eyes - a Jewish parent.

My parents. Those kind, beautiful people I throw under the bus every time the shame of not being born Jewish courses through my veins. Maria and John. The most Goyish names ever, right? The names that aren't on the *ketubah* that hangs over the bed my husband and I share. My blood.

My father grew up during the height of the all-too-mildly-titled "Troubles" of Northern Ireland. A dirty-faced orphan of a young unwed mother and a faceless, unknown man, my dad was an embarrassment to his fellow Catholics, who in turn were despised by the Protestants (and vice versa). My dad came of age seeing bodies in the streets and neighbourhood churches being bombed, hearing frequent gunshots, and witnessing the brutality of both the police and of vigilantes. With this in mind, and other horrors that shall go untold, it's no wonder my dad identifies as a staunch atheist. I remember watching him dig in his garden when I was a little girl in my Sunday best, wondering how best to broach the issue.

1 Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Shavuot 39A



Mapping the West Bank

Liza Behrendt

The land lies fetal-
skin drawn on green earth,
borders in blood, smudged
by too many pens.

The map is a body bearing
no skeleton, no nerves,
only coded wounds that threaten
each breath with blue ink.

All goes according to plan.
Highway veins creep like incisions,
unfolding a virus indifferent
to the ripples of ancient hills.

Cartographers' trickery
rises from the paper landscape
to uproot an olive tree
with every pencil stroke.

"A refuge will it seem,
Lying in you like a curse, a demon's ambush,
The haunting of an evil dream,
Carrying it in your heart, across the world's expanse
You would proclaim it, speak it out,
But your lips shall not find its utterance.
Beyond the suburbs go, and reach the burial ground.

"Speak to them, bid them rage!
Let them raise the outraged hand,
Let them demand!
Demand the retribution for the shamed,
Of all the centuries and every age!"

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[i] Huddled Masses: Jewish History in the Former Soviet Union by Harriet Kruman, chapter two

[ii] East End Jewish Radicals by William Fishman, chapter one

[iii] If You're an Egalitarian, How Come You're So Rich? by GA Cohen, chapter two

[iv] In 1956, during a closed session of the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, then-First Secretary Nikita Khrushchev gave a speech entitled 'On the Cult of Personality and its Consequences,' revealing damning information about Joseph Stalin's rule. The speech focused on the 1936-1939 'Great Purge' in which over 1.5 million people were imprisoned for 'anti-soviet activities', 680,000 of whom were executed. Text of the speech was leaked and published in the West several months later by the New York Times, the Observer, and the US State Department.

[v] November 2000 BBC report on the results of the first annual Global Migration Report by International Organization for Migration

[vi] 'The Lack of Power - The Most Shameful Disease: Bialik and the Kishinev Pogrom' by Michael Gluzman, Theory and Criticism Vol 22

"Dad, why don't you come with us to church?"

He didn't turn to face me, but stopped digging and rested against his shovel.

"Because I'm not a believer," he said.

My mother, on the other hand, is very much a believer. Classic Roman Catholic Italian upbringing. It follows that since she grew up in a huge family, she's comfortable with Catholicism's bizarro pantheon: The trinity, all of the saints (there's a saint for everything!), the Marys Virgin and Magdalene. Mom loves statues of the Virgin Mother and St Frances of Assisi and decorates the house with them, much to my father's silent chagrin. She was pretty crushed when her kids didn't connect with the religion at all, and further disappointed when both of us became Jews, but has come a long way.

The summer I got married, my mother stayed with me for a month. I shyly, cautiously asked her if she would like to come with me to a kabbalat shabbat service. This particular service happens once a month and has beautiful Sephardic music and dancing (this is a whole other story, but given my ancestry and upbringing, I find myself much more at home with Sephardim). She accepted, and I was thrilled.

When everyone got up to dance to *Lecha Dodi*, my mom got up too. We held hands and moved our feet, both thoroughly fucking up the steps that everyone else knew. We laughed and I looked into my mother's eyes and heard her sing four little tentative Hebrew syllables along with everybody else:

"*Lecha Dodi,*" she sang.
"*Liqrat kallah, p'nei Shabbat neqabelah,*" I sang back.

I hold this moment now. I hold it in my hands and in my heart. I hold this moment of strange, tender, intercultural, intergenerational love, and I feel so good and whole.

I feel like a Jew.

I feel like my mother's daughter.

And I don't care if those two things are at odds.

The way these forces interact to create conditions of displacement is an essay in itself. But as a result of imperialism, there is often an influx of new and unwanted populations into the territory of empire. The Russian Empire's annexation of Polish-Lithuanian territory brought most of its jewish population and led to the creation of the Pale of Settlement as a confinement zone. Similarly, as Canada continues to engage in destructive imperialist ventures around the world, migration levels are hitting record numbers[v]. People are trying to gain entry to the few rich countries that are creating conditions of displacement around the world. In response, Canada's immigration policies have once again become excessively restrictive. New draconian and racist policies have criminalized and demonized migrants and the jewish community has remained silent.

Where was the jewish community when 500 Tamil migrants arrived on a boat seeking refugee status and were thrown into detention centres? Where was the jewish community when the Canadian government put up billboards in Hungary encouraging Roma people to not bother filing refugee claims? Where was the jewish community when the Supreme Court of Canada ruled it illegal for migrant workers to unionize?

Until we can finally learn the lessons embedded within our histories of oppression and displacement and realize they demand us to fight in solidarity with those experiencing oppression and displacement today, we will always remain in galus - lost, unaware of who we truly are, increasingly defined by the shameful concessions we've made.

After the 1903 pogrom, the Jewish Historical Commission in Odessa sent Chayim Bialik to Kishinev to write a report about what had happened[vi]. He wrote two poems instead. These are two excerpts translated from his second poem, 'In Schite Shtot,' or In the City of Slaughter.

would answer to them, and began union-busting efforts with the teachers. Not only had the basic principles of the school been betrayed in the view of my parents, the underhanded way it had happened left a deep impression on them.

At the same time, my parents' congregation began to encounter hostility and manipulation from the larger shul they operated out of. The shul seemed intent on either absorbing the congregation or pushing them out. My parents' congregation was part of a series of institutions that grew out of a yeshiva for the recently-religious in Israel. The congregation operated autonomously from Israel and met costs by fundraising and membership fees. After years of struggling and fundraising they discovered that contrary to what they'd always been told, the yeshiva had been taking money from the congregation to finance it's expansion. Even worse, for years the Israeli leadership had been in communication with the bigger shul that housed them. The yeshiva eventually took everything. Ties were cut with Israel, the congregation was forced out of the shul, and they couldn't afford a new location. My parents' spiritual home was destroyed.

GALUS

For my family, disillusionment has been a recurring site of galus, for my great-grandfather, my grandfather, and for my parents. The social, political, and economic forces that created the conditions that displaced my great-grandparents were not unique to their time and continue to thrive today. In my family, we've never seriously confronted these forces. We've assimilated into a society that allows us to benefit from them. We've run to utopian projects or intentional communities that might hide or shield us from having to encounter them. And we've been continuously surprised and disillusioned when aspects of these forces find their way into our lives. But these root causes of displacement are also the foundations of our society - capitalism, imperialism, white supremacy, patriarchy, the state - we don't escape them by simply looking away.

I am a Jew
Oz Bahadur

I am a Jew. This is a simple sentence, but it is one that has always contained a multitude of issues, and one fraught with dangers both external and existential. To be a Jew in the Americas has granted breathing room, some passing safety from the pogroms of Europe, but it is by no means safe. There is still hatred and ignorance to combat, still a deep-seated resentment of Jews as outsiders, perpetuated by Caucasian settlers and passed on to later waves of immigrants.

I say all of this not because I think it is unknown, but because I want a clear context for what I am about to say next – I am a Jew, but most Jews would not recognize me. My surname is neither European or Israeli, my skin is dark, my family has no Holocaust stories. I was not circumcised at birth, nor was I given to any of the less formalized Jewish rites of passage – no summer camp, no Hebrew class, no awkward bar mitzvah party. I am apart from all the hallmarks of North American Jewry, yet I am just as much a story of the diaspora as they are. I am a Jew in my heart.

I am a Jew historically, as well. My rabbi once told me that my partner and I represent the two main stories of Jews by choice – one who chooses from their own consideration, and one who chooses from their family's past. Jewish souls, both, yearning to rejoin the diaspora. My wife is often regarded as the one with Jewish antecedents and myself as the out-and-out convert, but it is in fact the opposite; she is white, however, and therefore seen more 'naturally' as a Jew than I. My story is complex and generational, but the essence is that my mother's mother's mother was raised a Jew, and so I am a Jew as well.

I say all this, again, to provide context, and to ask a question. Intellectually, most people know that there are Jews of every colour and description, but in practice things are quite different. Even now, think to yourself what Jew looks like – do you imagine someone fair-skinned? Someone from Germany, or Poland? At a stretch, do you see a tanned Israeli? This is the trap of the diaspora – in forging an identity apart from those we live amongst, we have left behind those who do not fall neatly into the majority. This is not an issue unique to Jews, but to the

many diasporas and minorities. When you ask someone to picture a Jamaican, for example, or someone queer, or someone Canadian even, there is a very rigid definition that people adhere to without realizing it. Jamaicans are not all black, queers are not all white with asymmetrical haircuts, Canadians are not all stocky Caucasians with a love for hockey. The Canadian definition is particularly problematic for myself, being born here but of Caribbean descent and a Jew besides – I am asked where I was born (Toronto) and then where I'm 'really from' or what my 'real' name is, and often told how 'weird' I am. And yet, in the Americas, we are almost all outsiders.

I am a Jew, and no less of one for being of Caribbean descent, and no less a Canadian or a queer. My identity is composed of all three, and more besides. A few years ago, when I attended a screening for the 20th anniversary of the film 'Half the Kingdom' (a documentary of Jewish feminists from the 80s), an audience member described the dilemma quite succinctly. She said, "I am a lesbian, and Jewish, and pro-Palestinian, but I feel I can only play one of those cards at a time." Nevermind the confusion and resentment you have to deal with when you play even one card, but to endure that wilful ignorance is *exhausting*. I can argue my gender identity, my religious identity, my racial identity, my political identity – but at some point, I would rather be myself than to have to prove it, especially when I have to prove more than one at a time.

I say all this because it is not my responsibility, not our responsibility, to continually remind you that we are with you and among you. It is not enough for you to speak the words of intersectionality, but you must believe them in your heart. We do not need you as saviours or allies, but simply as our fellows – to welcome us without othering us with your surprise and your curiosity.

I am a Jew, and that should be enough.

After Germany broke its non-aggression pact with the USSR, my grandfather enlisted in the Canadian Air Force to fight the Nazis. After the war, he stayed in Europe to do organizing work for the communist party. When he came home, he enrolled at McGill University under the Canadian equivalent of the GI Bill. At the behest of the party leadership, he and his friend handed out copies of the Daily Worker on the steps of campus and were kicked out of school. The party, which had promised to support them, did nothing. As a result of the expulsion, his friend was blacklisted, couldn't find work, and killed himself.

While my grandfather was dealing with all of this, the national leadership of the Canadian Communist Party was keeping Khruschev's revelations about Stalin secret from its membership[iii]. The New York Times eventually published the full text of Khruschev's speech[iv] and much of the Western party membership became totally disillusioned. My grandfather walked away from the communist party, along with most of his relationships, and started a textile business.

My father still remembers that time in my grandparents' house. There was a lot of pain. My grandfather quickly replaced Communism with Zionism and developed a more assimilationist outlook as anti-Semitism began to ease and his business became more successful. My father was not taught Yiddish.

THE SUBURBS

Since both my parents were raised in secular, relatively assimilationist homes, as they got older they became interested in exploring their jewishness and seeking out environments that insisted on some kind of 'moral bottom line.' They found both things in religion. While my mother was always more of a believer than my father, both became very invested in Modern Orthodox Judaism and decided to move to a Modern Orthodox community in the suburbs to raise my sisters and me. They got a mortgage on a house, signed me and my sisters up for the private school, and started a small congregation with a group of families who'd also recently become religious and shared similar values.

Things didn't take long to go sour. A group of powerful people in the community worked in secret to force out the principal of the school after he took one too many principled positions - positions that reflected the ideals that brought my parents to that community. This group took over the board of the school, hired a new principal that

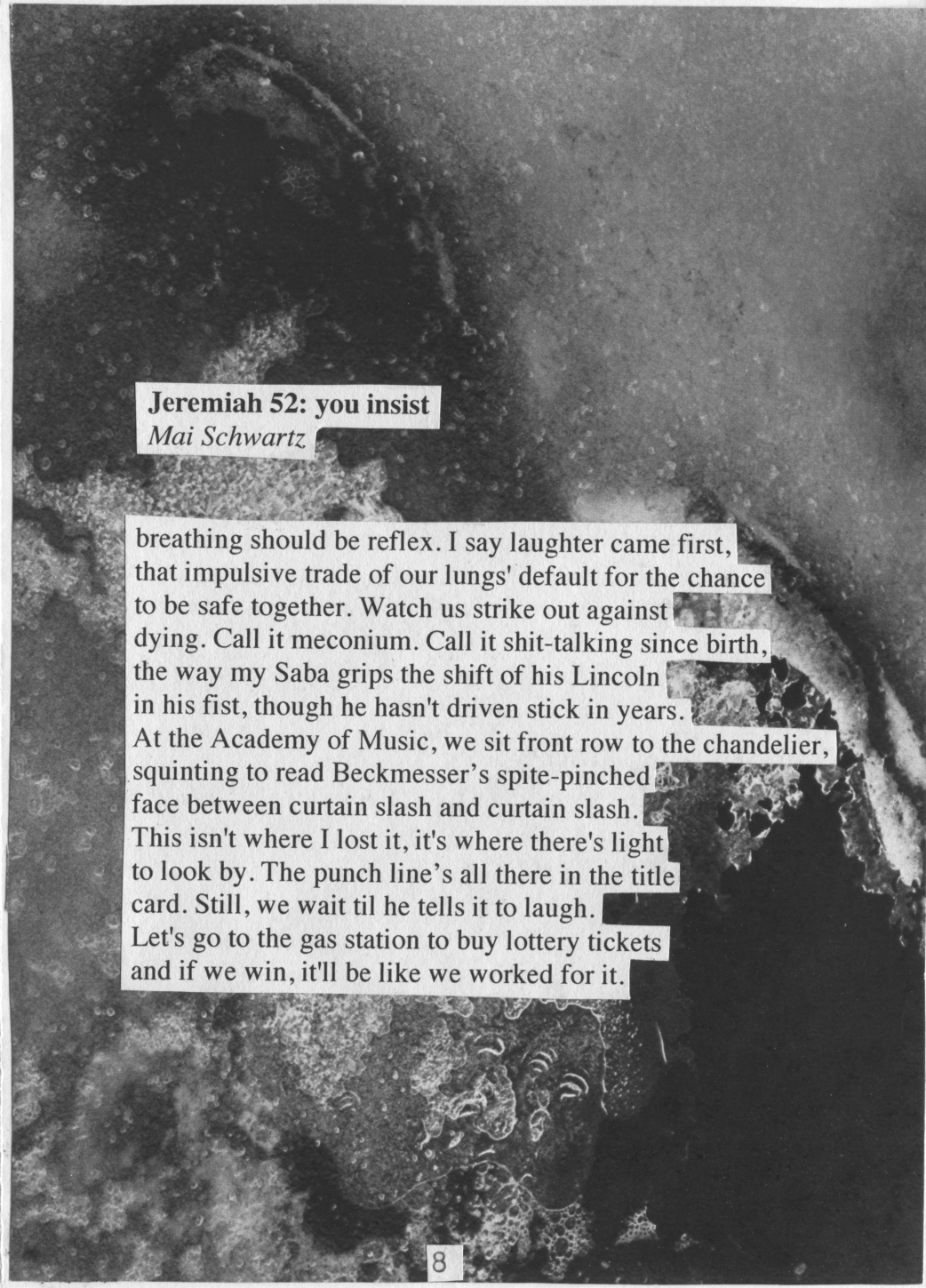
During my great-grandfather's life, jews within the Russian Empire were restricted to an area known as the Pale of Settlement. State schools were established specifically for jews to "*uproot their harmful beliefs which are influenced by the Talmud.*"[i] While successful in assimilating many jews, these institutions ironically became a hotbed of political radicalization for many others. The enlightenment concepts at the core of the state's educational system provided a framework for various leftist analyses which many students honed and brought back with them to the pale. Within the context of the ongoing effects of the Haskala, this contributed to the creation of a strong secular jewish society within the pale of settlement with distinctly jewish leftist political movements[ii].

So coming from a family of Maskalim who went to these schools, who were communists and secularists, my great-grandfather grew up in a relatively unique historical moment. Unlike many Russian jews isolated to shtetls, my grandfather had access to Odessa, the empire's model port city within the pale of settlement and open to jews. Very close to Kishinev and many other jewish towns, Odessa became a hub for the jewish intellectual class. Since it was a free port, many jews were able to engage in economic pursuits and ways of life forbidden in the rest of the pale. It was in the midst of this cosmopolitan existence that pogroms and restrictive Czarist policies began to push jews out. For my great-grandfather, the displacement from his home was extremely disillusioning and strengthened his internationalist communist outlook once he arrived in Montreal.

The way my family tells it, both Channa and Benyamin eventually worked themselves to death. They were bringing over and supporting their extended family while balancing the stresses of labour organizing and blacklists. My grandfather was 13 when his parents died, the same age as his father when he was forced to leave his home near Kishinev. He soon took up the political fight of his parents.

THE PARTY

When I ask my grandfather about his time with the communist party, he usually gets upset or evasive. He tells me that the day his life started making sense was the day he started his own business. He says the time he spent with the radical left amounted to nothing but wasted years. He asks me what I'm doing with my life then cuts me off, telling me I should be focusing on a better career path. This is because my grandfather was a true believer in communism.


Jeremiah 52: you insist
Mai Schwartz
breathing should be reflex. I say laughter came first,
that impulsive trade of our lungs' default for the chance
to be safe together. Watch us strike out against
dying. Call it meconium. Call it shit-talking since birth,
the way my Saba grips the shift of his Lincoln
in his fist, though he hasn't driven stick in years.
At the Academy of Music, we sit front row to the chandelier,
squinting to read Beckmesser's spite-pinched
face between curtain slash and curtain slash.
This isn't where I lost it, it's where there's light
to look by. The punch line's all there in the title
card. Still, we wait til he tells it to laugh.
Let's go to the gas station to buy lottery tickets
and if we win, it'll be like we worked for it.
8

The following is an excerpt from an interview with filmmaker Alexis Mitchell from a May 2009 broadcast of radio613. This particular episode of radio613 was highlighting *Inextricable* - a video art installation by Alexis Mitchell & Sharlene Bamboat (who work in collaboration under the name Bambitchell), which opened in Toronto in June 2009. *Alexismitchell.com*

radio613 is a collective and radio show exploring Jewish politics, culture, and religious life from an autonomous perspective. Some minor edits to the interview have been made for *Doykeit #2*. The full podcast is on our website:
http://radio613.wordpress.com/2009/06/01/episode-22-queering-notions-of-diaspora

Avi (co-host and radio613 collective member): Hello Alexis, welcome to the show!

Alexis: Thank you for having me.

Avi: So, Alexis, you've got a film installation coming up June 1 – very exciting. It's called "Inextricable". Can you tell us what it's gonna look like at the Goldfarb Art Gallery in a couple days?

Alexis: Yeah, sure. So, it's basically a multi-channel video installation – video and sound, working around themes of diaspora. The installation is coming from a course that I developed with a colleague, Sharlene Bamboat, who's doing the piece with me. We're working under supervisor/professor Bobby Noble. We read a lot of theory around diaspora being tied to a homeland. And we can look at diaspora in that way: as upholding the sense of homeland and upholding this notion of the nation-state and the ideals that come along with the nation-state that are strict and binary and uninterested in narratives that move outside of these boundaries. So then, by queering this notion of diaspora we see diaspora as being the sort of anti-nation or moving away from nation-state and figuring out this space in between nations or constantly in between nation. I think the most inspiring thing that we read was Dionne Brand's *Map to the Door of No Return*. She's a Canadian writer who's part of the Black diaspora. She writes fiction and theory and poetry, but this book is specifically poetry/prose. She talks about diaspora as being almost like this doorway. The space that you exist in is not in front of the

Untitled
David Zinman

Growing up in a mostly white middle-class Modern Orthodox jewish community, I understood diaspora within the Zionist vocabulary I was taught to use. Israel was the centre of the jewish world and those of us living outside the state were in galut (exile), hopelessly lost. The nazi genocide and the founding of the state of Israel acted as a one-size-fits-all historical answer for questions of who we were and how we should relate to the world. As diaspora jews, our duties were to twofold - practice Judaism and support Israel, both of which could be fulfilled by making aliya (the holy task of migrating to Israel).

I came to reject religion in my teens and Zionism in my twenties. I quickly retired the concept of diaspora along with the rest of the religious Zionist vocabulary I'd grown up with. It wasn't until encountering the term describing other communities' experiences with forced migration that I began to re-think it's relationship to the community I came from. Now when I now think about diasporic jewry, I think of histories of jewish displacement and its intergenerational effects. I think of continuity and history and the possibility of solidarity with people who are experiencing now what Ashkenazi jews faced generations ago. I think about my grandfather, his parents, and how their lives have affected my parents' and mine.

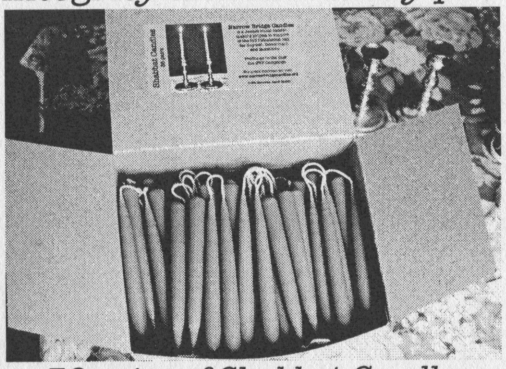
Unfortunately, the way my family has retained and transmitted its history falls along strong patriarchal lines. There are many women in my family history whose lives are now impossible to uncover. The narrative I've constructed here reflects the unfortunate priorities of remembrance of several generations of my family - focusing on the men with passing mention of the women, despite their achievements.

KISHINEV

My great-grandfather Benyamin fled Moldavia (now Moldova) after the Kishinev pogrom of 1903. He was 13 years old and his parents sent him to Rotterdam to take a boat to Montreal. Once he arrived in Canada, he was taken in by distant relatives and began working in the garment factories. His wife Channa arrived shortly after. Both of them were secular communists from secular communist families and they became active in the Montreal labour movement, trying to organize union shops.

Narrow Bridge Candles

Creating space for ritual
with integrity and liberatory potential



36 pairs of Shabbat Candles

Narrow Bridge Candles is a Jewish Ritual Candlemaking Project in support of the full Palestinian call for Boycott Divestment and Sanctions of Israel.

All candles are made with 100% beeswax from hives in the SF Bay Area. Profits go to the Stop the Jewish National Fund (JNF) Campaign. www.stopthejnf.org

Narrow Bridge Candles currently provides:

- Shabbat Candles (Bag of 4 pairs or Box of 36 pairs)
- Havdallah Candles
- Yahrtzeit Candles
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For ordering and more information, go to:
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U.S. and Outside the U.S. Shipping available

doorway or behind the doorway, but it's like the frame of the door. It's like, the only place of true existence is that space in between places rather than, you know, having a homeland or a home. So those were the concepts we were working with. And we read this theorist Jasbir Puar who's quite progressive – writes a lot about diaspora, queerness, post-colonial studies – she does work around Israel/Palestine. Her work is vast. She talks about the suicide bomber who's body sort of fits into this notion of diaspora and being in between spaces and thus that body is subversive and queer because it's constantly in motion between *things*, not set or fixed in *one thing*.

So, just working with those ideas we came up with a video installation. We basically just took three different videos along the same theme and made them talk to each other in different ways. The video on the front of the window is going to be shown through this material which allows part of the image to be seen and part of it just to be shown through the window so basically all you see is rays of light. That image is of me – and I'm a white female - in this vast field. So I time lapsed it so I'm awkwardly running through the field and then I run up to the camera and the camera's too tall and it doesn't see me so I keep jumping up in front of the camera so I'm noticed, in a way. And then on the wall opposite when you walk in it's an Indian male wearing white boxer shorts and a red bandana running through an alleyway filled with graffiti. And, we basically have him running in one direction on the top layer and then running in another direction on the bottom layer and it's looped so he's constantly running in opposite directions at the same time. Then on the third wall we have a three-channel – it was shot on super 8 – projection using Homi Bhabha's notion of the "third space". This is something that Sharlene was specifically interested in. Homi Bhabha talks about post-colonial temporality and basically the invention of tradition through re-staging of the past. It's something that we also came to through this notion of queering diaspora – I guess queering this notion of the "post-colonial" and bringing up the notion: how can we say that we're in a post-colonial when, ya know, folks in Palestine probably wouldn't say we're in post-colonial or how can we say we're pre-colonial and then post- when not everywhere in the world is in the same space? So, just linking these ideas to space and time we decided this video is meant to be a tryptic – a three channel installation all beside each other and, I guess, each video would

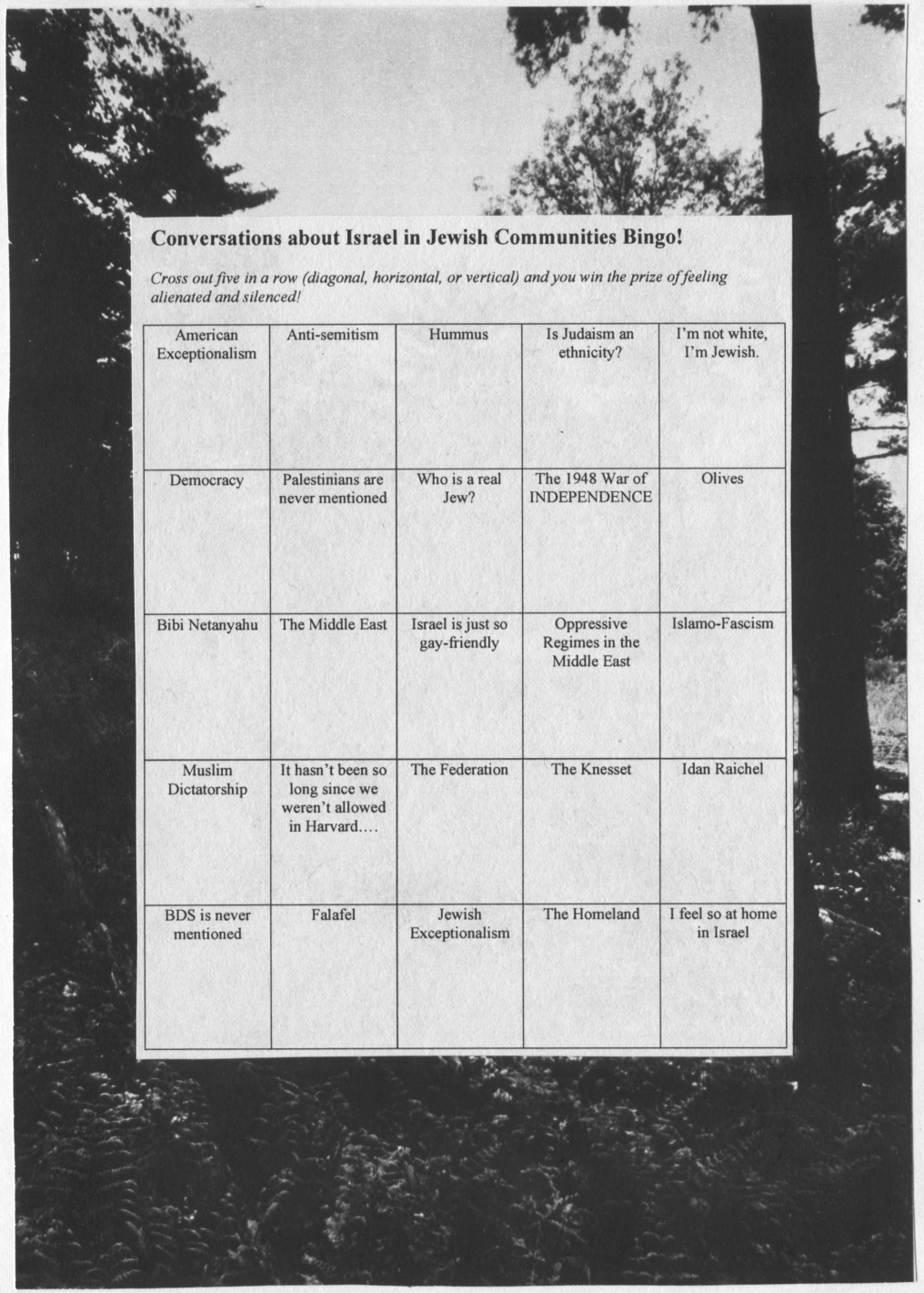
represent, if we're speaking in those terms, the pre-colonial and post. But then, in order to queer that we got the videos to jump from wall to wall so that there's no order, basically, to those pieces.

Avi: I was wondering if you could maybe elaborate a little more on this idea of a diaspora that is queered, as not being dependent on the state. That's a really powerful idea to be thinking about. Yeah, could you elaborate a bit on that and speak to how it relates to your own experience too?

Alexis: Yeah, I was gonna speak from my own experience cause I think a) being white and b) being Jewish is a very unique feeling of diaspora. I've noticed that especially working with a Pakistani-Canadian (Sharlene) who has lived half of her life in Pakistan and half of her life in Canada. Yeah, I've noticed a very distinct, obvious difference of how we experience diaspora in any way. I think this notion of queering diaspora is really important, but it's also, obviously very specific to each person. Like, I went to Hebrew school growing up where I would paint Israeli flags in art class and be forced to celebrate Israel's birthday every year. And, when we would trace our family trees and I would ask where my family's from and what does Israel have to do with me? Why is this considered my homeland when my family's Eastern European? Everybody I guess can be traced back somewhere, but, even from a very young age, I didn't feel that connection – it kind of felt really forced to me.

Avi: Yup.

Alexis: It's not that I feel that I am Eastern European – ya know, my mom's family is from Russia, my dad's family is from Poland – and that is my experience cause I've been living in a separate culture from that for generations. So, it's not that I necessarily feel that, but living in Canada and knowing that I'm not native to this land there's sort of that feeling of having an every place and no place. But, in order to be critical of where we exist, or where we don't exist, I think it's really important to not hold something on a pedestal and say "this is that perfect untouchable land" and nothing can be critiqued of it because that's where I belong and it's where my home is. And, just working with Sharlene, something that she's been talking about



Conversations about Israel in Jewish Communities Bingo!

Cross out five in a row (diagonal, horizontal, or vertical) and you win the prize of feeling alienated and silenced!

American Exceptionalism	Anti-semitism	Hummus	Is Judaism an ethnicity?	I'm not white, I'm Jewish.
Democracy	Palestinians are never mentioned	Who is a real Jew?	The 1948 War of INDEPENDENCE	Olives
Bibi Netanyahu	The Middle East	Israel is just so gay-friendly	Oppressive Regimes in the Middle East	Islamo-Fascism
Muslim Dictatorship	It hasn't been so long since we weren't allowed in Harvard....	The Federation	The Knesset	Idan Raichel
BDS is never mentioned	Falafel	Jewish Exceptionalism	The Homeland	I feel so at home in Israel

and we use this to gather together our Fringes before saying the sh'ma. We actually stand and spread out the tallitot so we are holding each others' tzitzit in a circle. This is also done call and response, with the entire group saying the last line together:

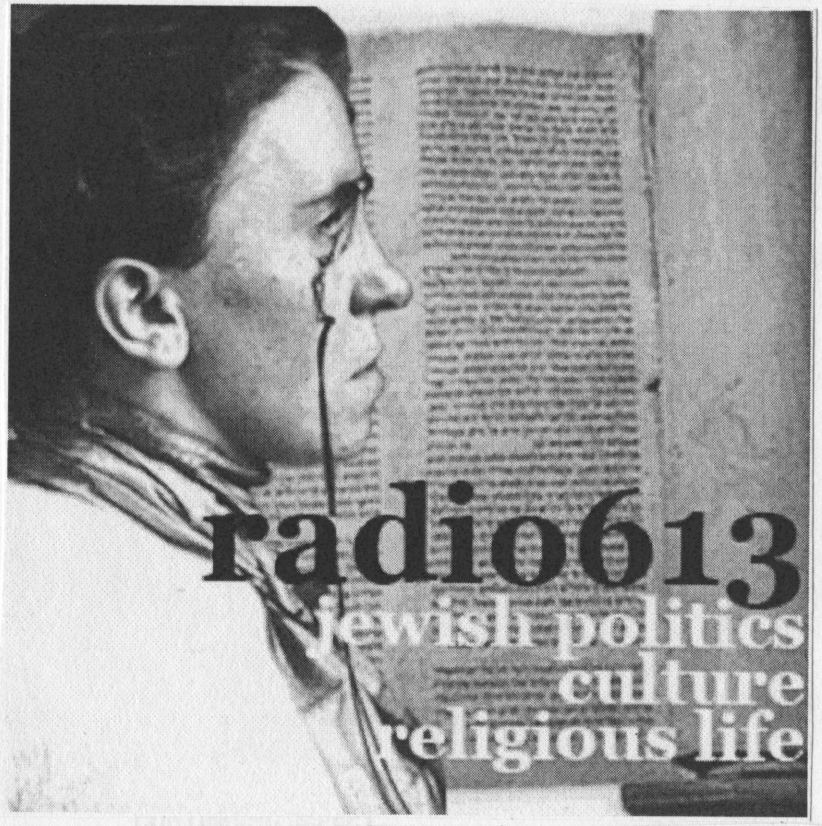
Gatherings
Elliott Femynye batTzedek

Gather your strengths
and gather your failures
Gather your kin
and gather your strangers
Gather what you love
and what you fear
Gather what you have lost
and what you have yet to find

Find the courage to proclaim
"All we gather is sacred"

And something we *don't* do that matters for thinking about diasporic, non-zionist, non-triumphalist Judaism – for the aleynu, we could never find a poem or prayer that felt right. While we agree that the metaphor of a time when all will be resolved and justice will prevail is a useful thing, the image from the aleynu disturbed us—not only "god the big manly king" but the idea that wholeness will be reached only when OUR god is acknowledged by everyone else. Ugh. But the ritual element of standing, chanting together, bowing and rising goes deep, so we chose to simply hum the tune of the aleynu together. This keeps a tie to our tradition while also making explicit that we don't have all the answers or the only answers, that we don't know what a time of real justice might look like, and that we are, as a community, dedicated to the work of bringing it about without needing to determine what exactly it may be.

recently is that she's actually starting to feel that she does exist in this liminal space, this third space between what homeland is, and is starting to actually feel, in an affective, feeling sort of way, that she doesn't feel that one place is home or doesn't have the same sort of wall up about Pakistan that she probably had before.



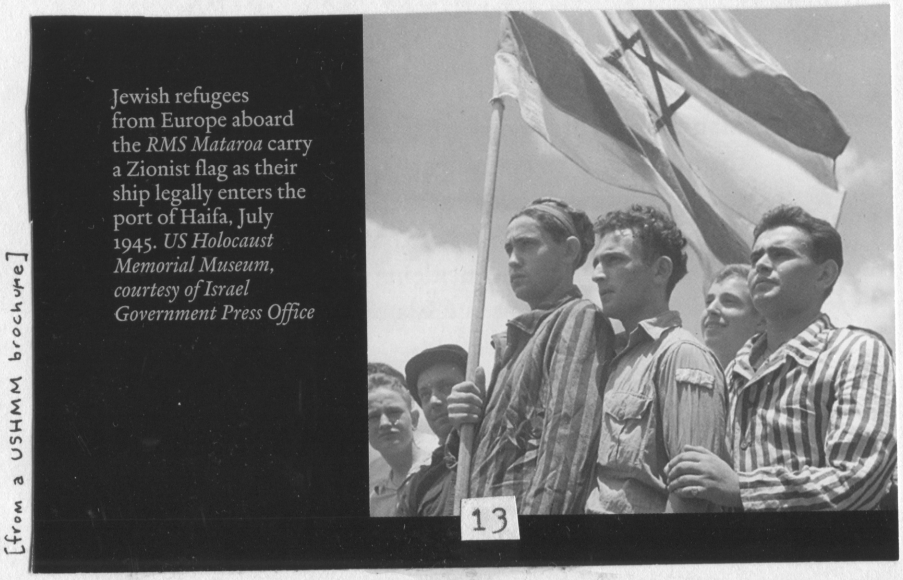
Avi: I went through some of that institutional education and got a lot of the colonial history around Israel – and it didn't end up connecting to me in the long run either. But, when I think of what *is* meaningful to me and what really feels like, whether it's that third space or not, what feels like a spiritual home is a lot of Yiddish culture and forming and developing spiritual practice in community, that has nothing to do with this "homeland" Israel the state. It also seems that the more traditional view of homeland that you referred to as being dependent on a previous nation-state, if I understand that correctly, it's almost, to me, an insult to Jewish history. Just speaking about European Jewish history, the fact that it didn't really matter which nation-state Jews were living in, they didn't fit within those binaries of the State and were therefore pushed out, repressed, whatever. And

so, to tie the notion of diaspora to some other State (Israel), it seems like an insult to that past experience of what those state binaries do to people who refuse to assimilate or are indigenous to the land.

Alexis: Yeah, and I think, especially living in Canada, and thinking in Colonial terms, I feel that the way we understand diaspora and nation-state has a lot to do with whiteness. And, I think that it's important for white folks to remember or think about being a part of the diaspora and what that feels like because I think it's really easy for whiteness to seem invisible when it's not and it can't be. It has to be thought about in relation to colonialism and being settlers.

Avi: Something on the show that we think about is how to develop a Jewish anti-colonial perspective and how we can work to build on that. Do you have any ideas on that?

Alexis: Just from my own experiences I feel like it takes a lot of work to do that. For myself, it took a lot of work for me to understand my own privilege and understand the education that I grew up in and what I learned and the way that I unlearned it and undo some of that to realize that I'm actually outside of this dominant culture and it's really important for me to remain there and not for me to bypass these ideas of nation-state and what upholding colonialism does to a people.



Jewish refugees from Europe aboard the *RMS Mataroa* carry a Zionist flag as their ship legally enters the port of Haifa, July 1945. *US Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Israel Government Press Office*

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[from a USHMM brochure]

communities across the world, historically and today. Much of Zionism as a political movement rejected this, insisting that Jews deny and abandon their rich cultures, languages and histories in favor of a single Israeli identity. Among many problems we have with this as Feminists is the erasure of the diversity that sustains us, and the equation of "Israeli" with a hyper-masculine aggression.

One clear example of the rejection of the Israel/Diaspora dichotomy in favor of making Jewish meaning comes from Jeff Halper, activist in the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions, who to the question, "What can American Jews do to support Israel?" answered, "Get a life. Stop treating Israel like your synagogue." He expanded this to explain that Israel is a nation with its own political, national struggles and issues. While urging those of us listening to support those Israelis struggling for the kinds of social justice we believe in, he also warned that Israelis can not and should not be seen as carrying our Jewish identity for us. "If you want a Jewish life," he said, "build your own wherever you are."

By saying we are non-Zionist, we mean that we are building a Jewish life where we are here and now, embracing fully our lives as Jews, as Feminists, as residents of Philadelphia in 2007, whatever the complexities and contradictions these different worlds embody. And by consciously forming a havurah around these values, we mean to use the complexities of our lives to build and inform a rich and shared Jewish practice.

we use this as part of the call/response of the Bar'khu:

If Not
Rabbi Hillel, Adrienne Rich, Dane Kuttler

If I am not for myself
who is for me?
If I am only for myself
who am I?
If not now
then when?
If not with others
then how?
If not here
then where?

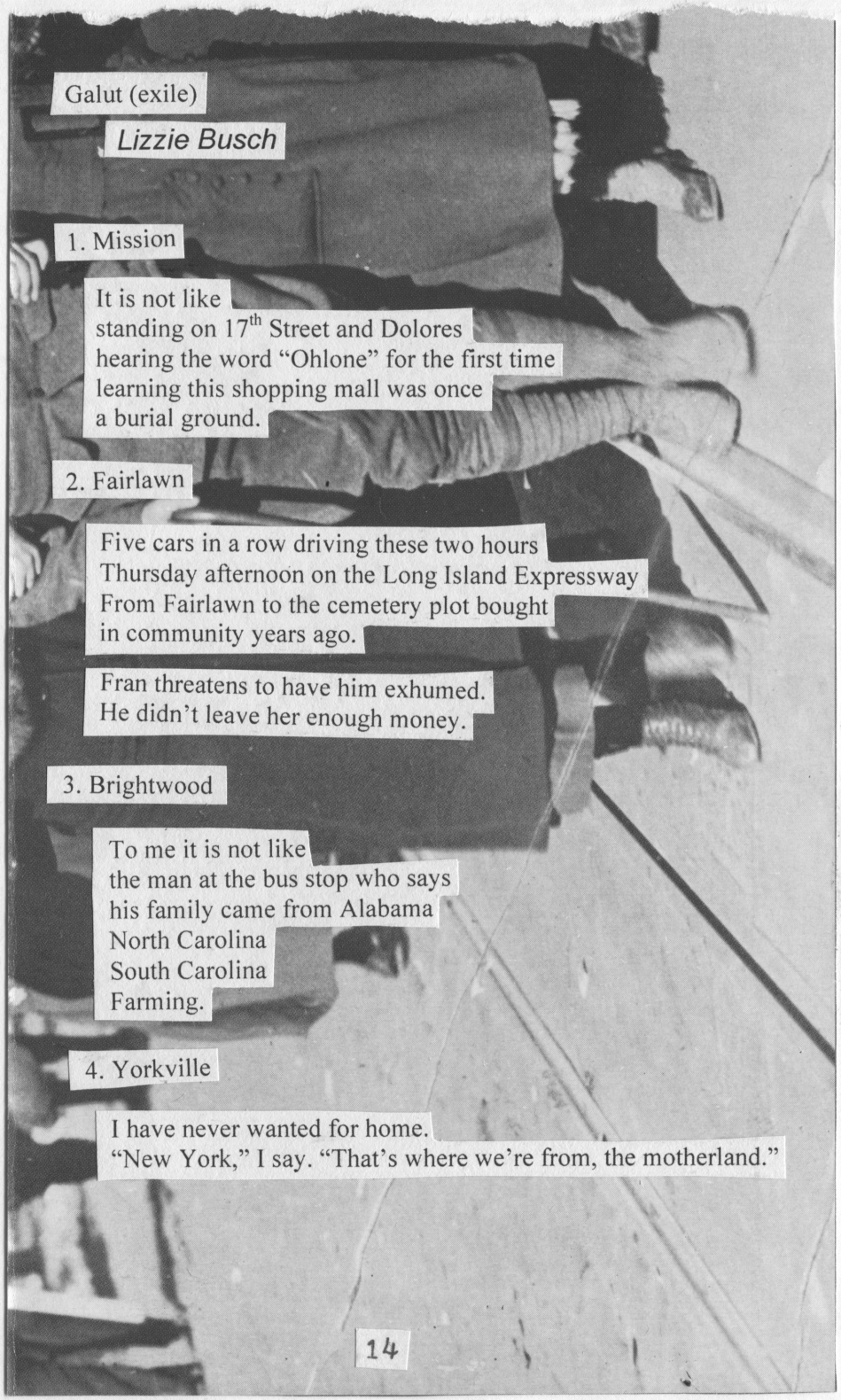
now in our synagogues and prayer spaces, the power and beauty and yearning of our communal dream has been reduced to meaning only the state of Israel, and even that only for its Jewish citizens.

By making a prayer space defined outside of the view that Zionism is the only answer to the question of Jewish oppression, we hope to unpack and recover some of the power of words like Zion or Jerusalem. We want to proudly reclaim the history of Jewish universalism, and the voices of the millions of Jews who have cried out for justice for all. And we want this to be reflected and expressed in the words we use when we pray. We don't know exactly what our liturgy will be or mean as we raise this lens and these questions, but we know the struggle will be worth the effort as we build honest voices for our prayers.

Rachel Adler says this about the "words of power" in liturgy: "Some words wear out and become empty. For others, new contexts render their power malign and not redemptive. Our present situation suggests, however, that the passing of old words of power and the birth of new ones is like the chevlei mashiach, the birth pangs portending the messianic time; people of good will hope for its coming, but would rather not be there before or after and not during the messy part."

3. "Separatism is the antithesis of cooperation and results in an ingrown and clannish remoteness which leads to cultural stagnation. Otherness thrives best when accompanied by active cooperation and interaction with neighboring cultures and civilizations and achieves an individuality which is of universal significance." Mordechai Kaplan, *Questions Jews Ask: Reconstructionist Answers*, 1958

As Reconstructionist Jews, we find tremendous value in Kaplan's understanding of living in two cultures. Because we know ourselves to be grounded in our lives as Jews, as U.S. citizens, and as so many other identities and relationships such as women, or, for three of us, as dykes, we reject the false dichotomy of Jewish life into the categories of Israel/Diaspora. While many communities of Jews within Israel are creating Jewish meaning and culture of tremendous value to us, we reject the notion that the only "authentic Jewish life" happens there. Jewish life as we know it exists only because of the religious, cultural, political, and intellectual innovations of Jewish



Galut (exile)

Lizzie Busch

1. Mission

It is not like
standing on 17th Street and Dolores
hearing the word "Ohlone" for the first time
learning this shopping mall was once
a burial ground.

2. Fairlawn

Five cars in a row driving these two hours
Thursday afternoon on the Long Island Expressway
From Fairlawn to the cemetery plot bought
in community years ago.

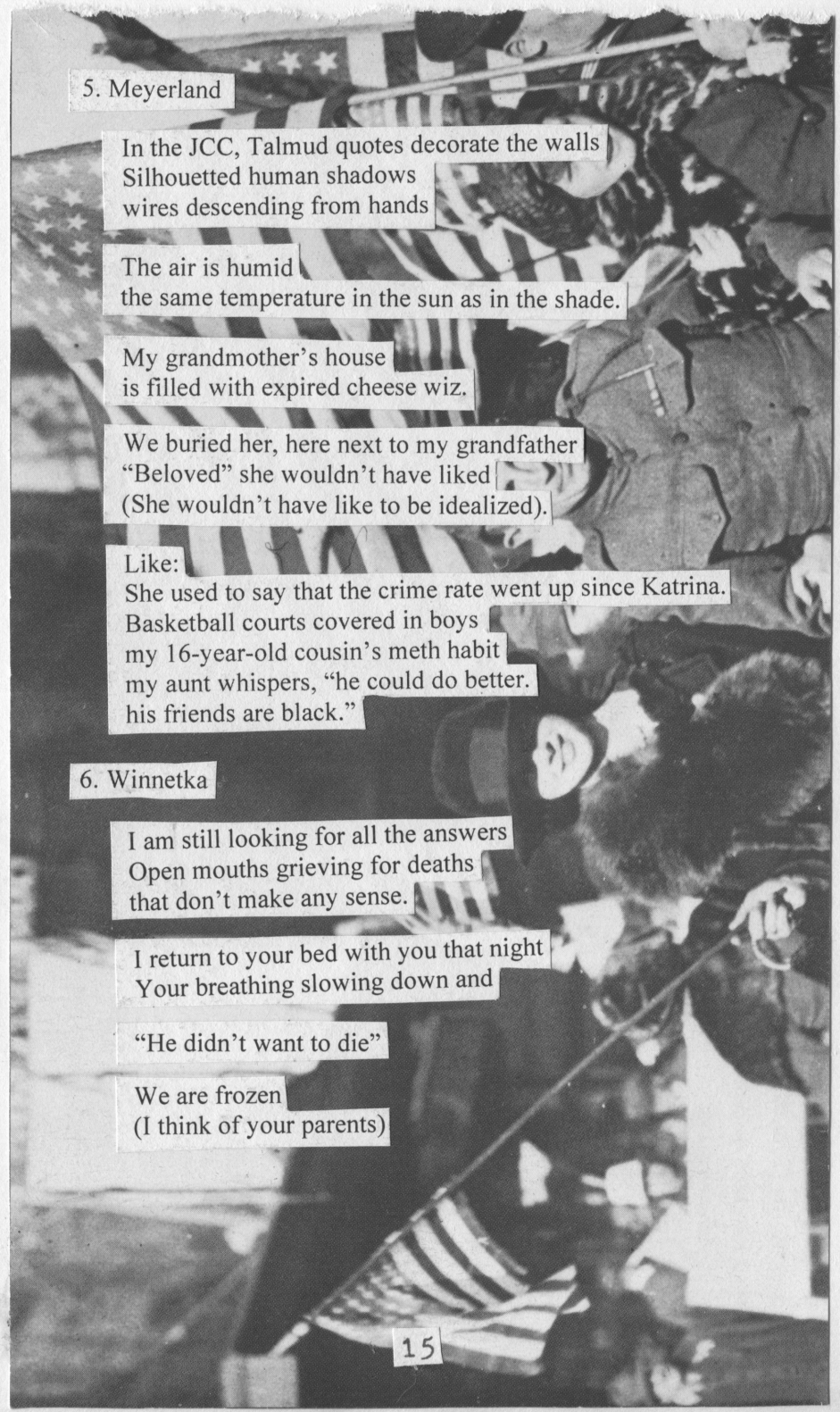
Fran threatens to have him exhumed.
He didn't leave her enough money.

3. Brightwood

To me it is not like
the man at the bus stop who says
his family came from Alabama
North Carolina
South Carolina
Farming.

4. Yorkville

I have never wanted for home.
"New York," I say. "That's where we're from, the motherland."



5. Meyerland

In the JCC, Talmud quotes decorate the walls
Silhouetted human shadows
wires descending from hands

The air is humid
the same temperature in the sun as in the shade.

My grandmother's house
is filled with expired cheese wiz.

We buried her, here next to my grandfather
"Beloved" she wouldn't have liked
(She wouldn't have like to be idealized).

Like:
She used to say that the crime rate went up since Katrina.
Basketball courts covered in boys
my 16-year-old cousin's meth habit
my aunt whispers, "he could do better.
his friends are black."

6. Winnetka

I am still looking for all the answers
Open mouths grieving for deaths
that don't make any sense.

I return to your bed with you that night
Your breathing slowing down and

"He didn't want to die"

We are frozen
(I think of your parents)

Why we define as a non-zionist havurah (excerpt) *Fringes/ http://fringeshavurah.com*

Although our answer will continue to evolve and deepen, these points capture our initial thinking:

1. "As a woman, I have no country. As a woman, my country is the whole world." Virginia Woolf

It is consonant with our identity as Feminists to refuse to pledge allegiance to a nation state, and even moreso to refuse to connect our spiritual expression to governments, militaries, and other apparatus of control. As Feminists, our political goal is a fearless and unblinking analysis of the truths of power relationships, whether between women and men, white people and people of color, or Jews and Arabs. To use Adrienne Rich's words, this "powerful, womanly lens" brings into focus what has been missing from our spiritual practices, necessitating this havurah in which space for multiple expressions of gender is not separable from space for multiple expressions of understanding of Jewish peoplehood.

2. "Zion by itself/is not enough." Adrienne Rich

We chose the name Fringes because we intend to open a space for those on the margins, including but not limited to the three of us. One important way we have been cut off has been our refusal to swear our love for the State of Israel. In this new sacred space we are opening, we understand Zionism to be one political strategy that Jews have used to address issues of oppression and cultural expression. It is a recent strategy, formed in response to historical events. It is not the only strategy, was not understood to be so by some of the best Jewish minds of our times, and is not the only answer from this point forward.

While we expect and invite a wide range of opinions on this in our community, we chose to define as non-Zionist because we feel strongly that the founding of Israel as a Jewish state has been used to re-write the meaning of too much of our liturgical lives. "Zion," for example, has been used for thousands of years to invoke a time and place of nearly messianic perfection, a time of peace and justice for all peoples, when all the world lives in a state of unity. But too often

this is
has no meaning
can not be told, and
seeps through my pores - by which, i mean,

sings to me at night

7. Descent

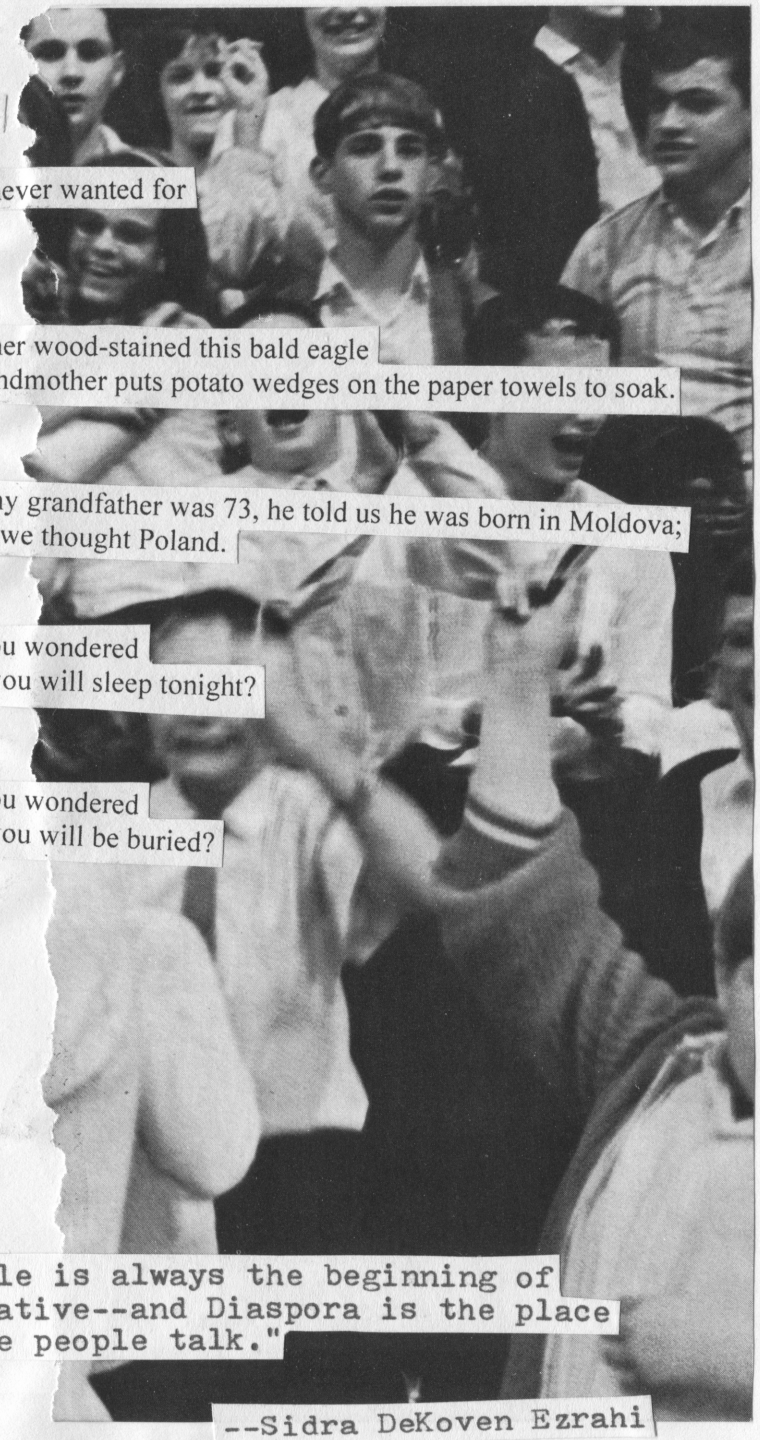
I have never wanted for
home:

Galut
my father wood-stained this bald eagle
my grandmother puts potato wedges on the paper towels to soak.

Galut
when my grandfather was 73, he told us he was born in Moldova;
before, we thought Poland.

Galut
have you wondered
where you will sleep tonight?

Galut
have you wondered
where you will be buried?



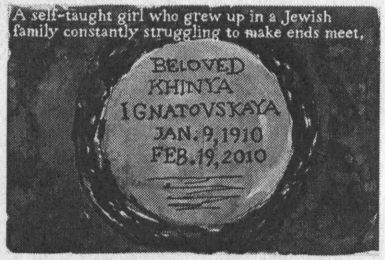
"Exile is always the beginning of narrative--and Diaspora is the place where people talk."

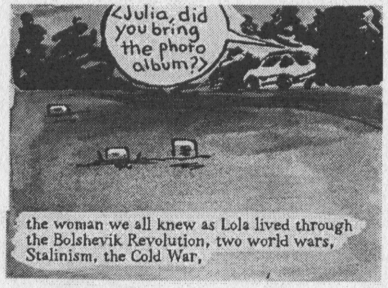
--Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi

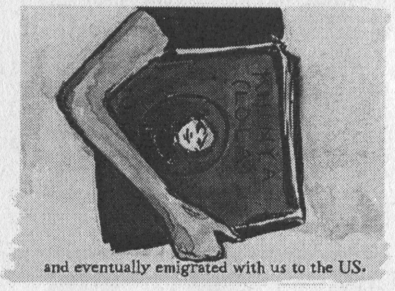
excerpts from

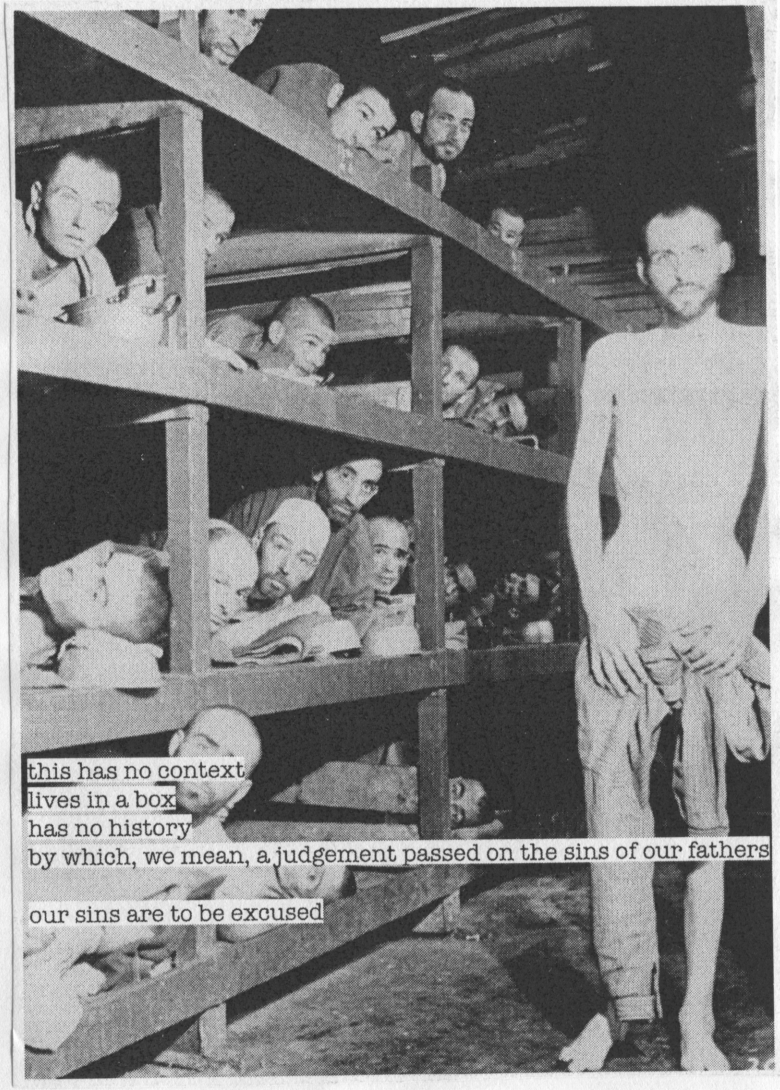
THE SOVIET

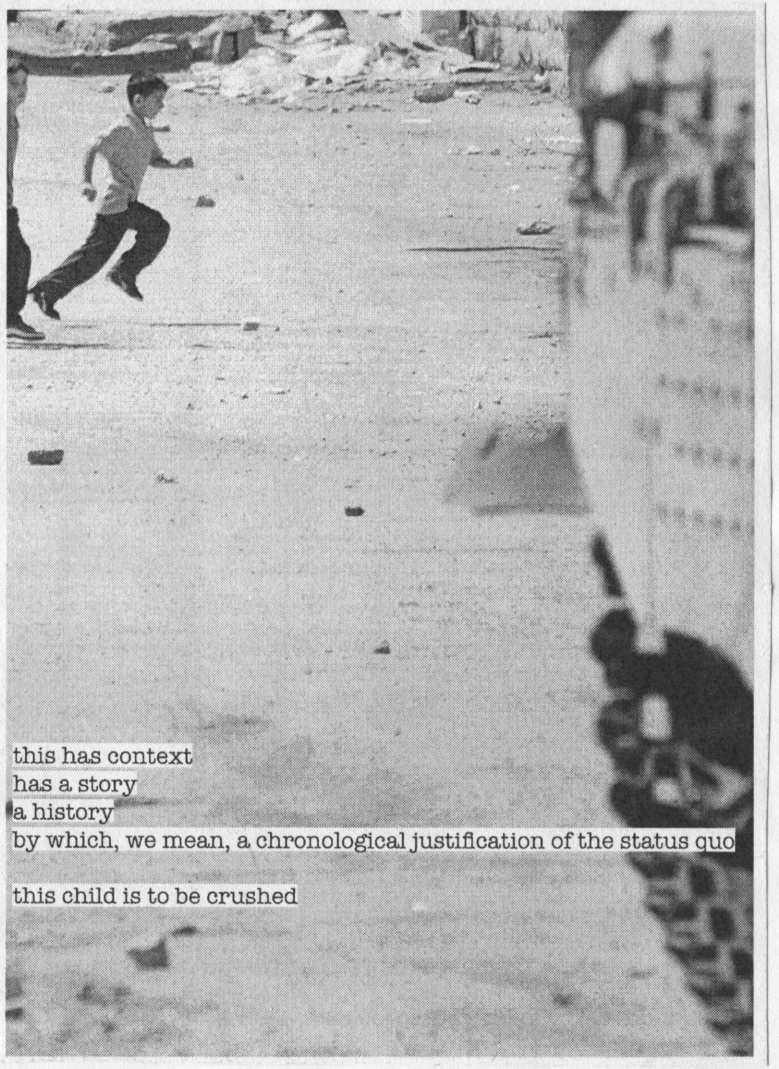
By Julia Alekseyeva


A self-taught girl who grew up in a Jewish family constantly struggling to make ends meet,
BELOVED
KHINYA
IGNATOVSKAYA
JAN. 9, 1910
FEB. 19, 2010


Julia, did you bring the photo album?
the woman we all knew as Lola lived through the Bolshevik Revolution, two world wars, Stalinism, the Cold War,




this has no context
lives in a box
has no history
by which, we mean, a judgement passed on the sins of our fathers
our sins are to be excused

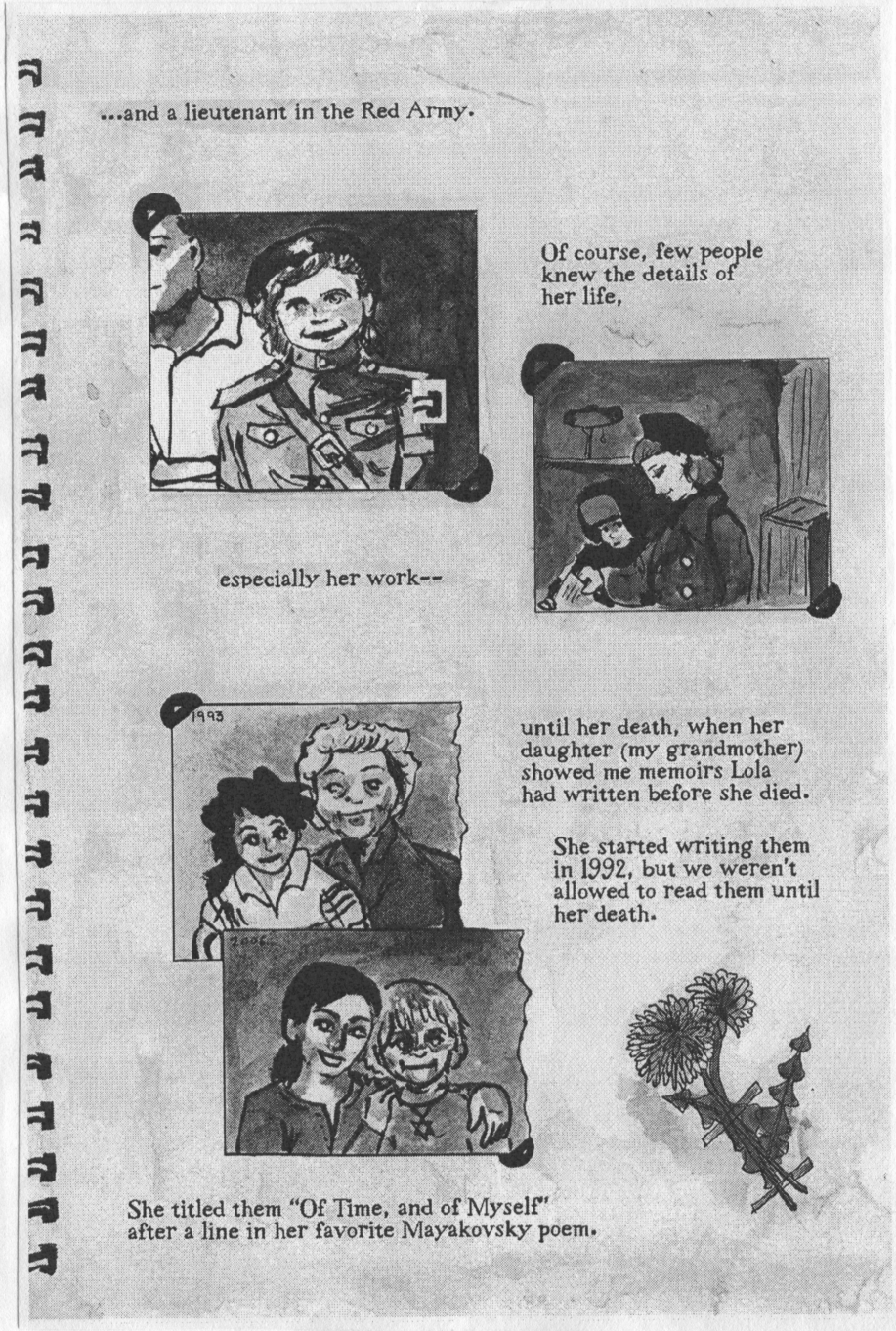

this has context
has a story
a history
by which, we mean, a chronological justification of the status quo
this child is to be crushed

Twice-married, divorced and widowed, Lola was as strong and independent a person as could be.

A believer in communism and an optimist until her last days,

She became a secretary for the NKVD*, a volunteer nurse during WWII,

*People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs, predecessor of the KGB


...and a lieutenant in the Red Army.
Of course, few people knew the details of her life,
especially her work--
1993
until her death, when her daughter (my grandmother) showed me memoirs Lola had written before she died.
She started writing them in 1992, but we weren't allowed to read them until her death.
She titled them "Of Time, and of Myself" after a line in her favorite Mayakovsky poem.

demystification of the typologies of historiographies commonly promulgated here in the colonial-nation-station of Australia

ronch/ acertainblindness.com.au

here in australia, the yardsticks of jewish identities are largely defined by the holocaust and zionist allegiance to the jewish nation-state. despite the outwardly secular configurations of these identities, the commitment to these twin pillars of orthodox-secular jewish identities in australia is deeply religious. the manner in which each pillar is treated is simultaneously fascinating, curious and deeply destructive.

historiographically, the holocaust is reified within a static ahistorical box, where the uniqueness of the event removes it from formal western linear history. the event is unable to be considered as anything except the most horrific aberration from the good, progressive, liberating narrative that we accept as modernity, capitalism, democracy and freedom. This approach encourages its adherents to relate to the holocaust through the lens of intergenerational trauma, family histories and communal narratives – that is, it can only be deeply personal because it is ahistorical.

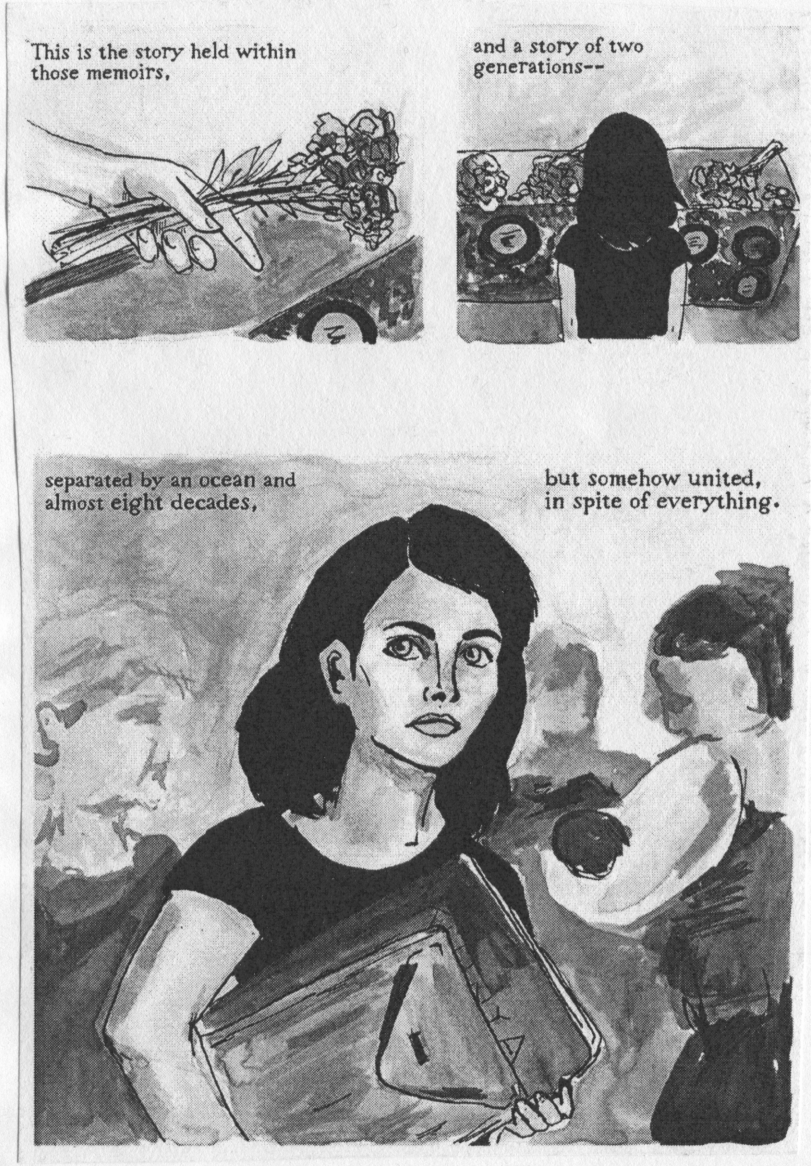
in direct opposition, is the historiographical morphology of the zionist narrative of the jewish nation-state. this narrative is presented, retold and justified as fully immersed within the stream of normative history, time and context. it is a cluster of tightly-interwoven narratives that beseech explanation. as a sophisticated piece of ideological marketing, adherents are encouraged to understand in order to better up-sell the narrative. the story is thousands of years old - ancient, fecund, rooted and packaged within a compelling story.

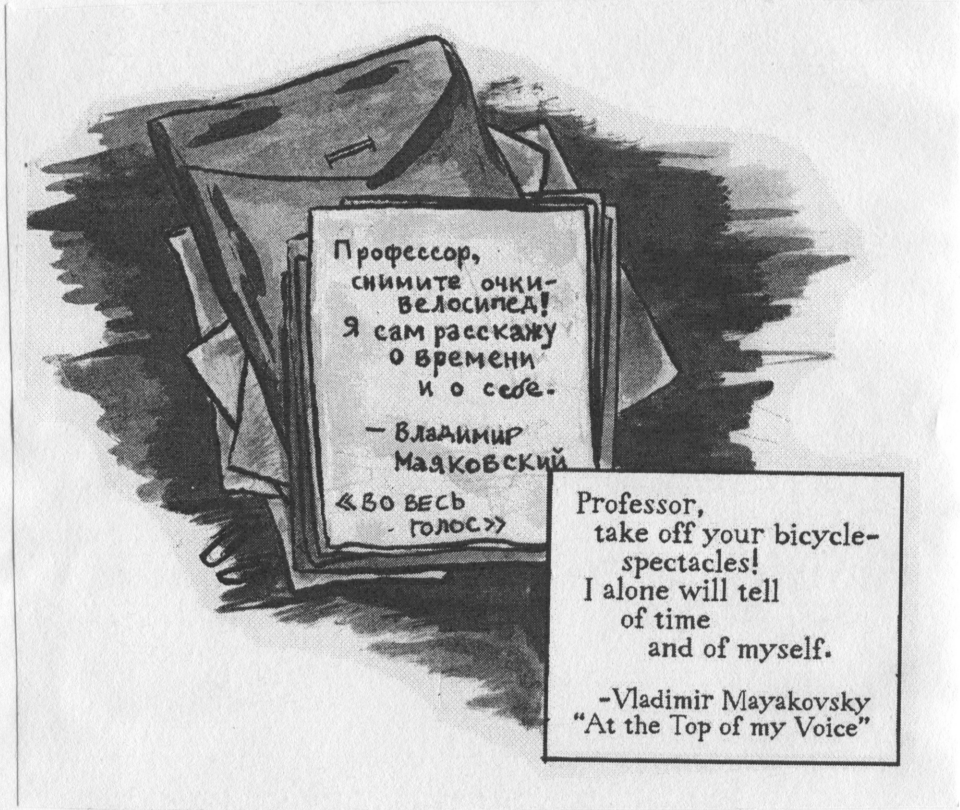
and yet.

I think my scholarly ancestors gave me this translation as an offering, left laying in wait for me for over 2000 years. With this translation understanding, *Ki Tavo* suggests that if we do not follow the commandments, especially of gratitude for the harvest and telling our history, we will become colonizers, which is equivalent in this portion to becoming *zua,* an object of trembling. Causing terror. So to my question, how do I be a proudly diasporic Jew when my diaspora is, even in the root of the Greek word, colonization, causing terror, a curse?

There are multiple words in the Hebrew Bible to mean this idea of going out, dispersion, being scattered. The word that Rabbinic Judaism picked up and ran with to refer to Jewish people being spread around outside of Eretz Yisrael is גָּלוּת, (Hebrew: *Galut*. Yiddish: *Golus*). The Exile. This word, both Biblically and rabbinically, does not have a rosy connotation. It is also seen as a curse. But for me, there is much more possibility in *galut* than in *zua*. While the verb root of *zua* is "to tremble", the root of *galut*, גלה, that in one form of the verb means exile, in another form means to discover, reveal, disclose, find out, expose. In the very word *galut* there is the charge to make things visible. I believe exposing things is a key first step in decolonization: uncovering origin stories, exposing power dynamics, uncovering hidden possibilities for how people can relate to each other and land.

Rather than being in diaspora, what other decolonization possibilities are there in *galut*? This is a real question, and I am trying to live into the struggles, possibilities and process of answering this question. One process for me is this digging into my own tradition and history and learning what medicine, what solutions, what healings are possible. In rabbinic tradition the word *galut* is contrasted with the word גאול, *geula*, redemption; they are opposites. I want to suggest that we dispersed Jews build on the closeness that our sages saw between *galut* and *geula,* and take up the challenge of *galut* as a process to bring us closer to *geula*. This is not to suggest that our history of dispersion was a predetermined progression to redemption. Instead it is to say: we are scattered, now what are we going to do in the places where we find ourselves, and what kind of future are we imaging and working towards? I struggle with the word redemption (okay, clearly I struggle with all the words). But I'm trying to lean into *geula*: a time when all have their needs met and live in sustainable relationship with each other and the earth; a time that has never been before: decolonization. The process of *galut* becoming *geula* is for all of our hearts and brains and guts and spirits to engage in; looking back while looking forward. This is my harvest offering.


This is the story held within those memoirs,
and a story of two generations--
separated by an ocean and almost eight decades,
but somehow united, in spite of everything.



The specific commandment that opens this portion is about bringing the offerings of the first fruits of the harvest to the Temple priests, and declaring "My father was a fugitive Aramean. He went down to Mitzrayim with meager numbers and sojourned there; but there he became a great and very populous people." (Deuteronomy 26.5) This commandment at the start of *Ki Tavo* teaches me to honor the land and the abundance of the land as bigger than myself, and to remember and tell my people's history. Among the many verses detailing gruesome punishments that the people will suffer if they don't follow the commandants, there we get to the verse in question: "You shall become לְזַעֲוָה unto all the nations of the earth."

This word, from לָזוּעַ, *l'zua,* to tremble, in its noun form *zua* here, means, "a trembling, ie. object of trembling, terror." *(Brown Driver and Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon)* Why would the 3rd century BCE Alexandrian authors of the Septuagint translate "an object of trembling" into " dispersion"?

We don't know how exactly the Septuagint came to be written. Historians will tell you approximately 275 BCE in Alexandria, the Egyptian capital city. I'll tell the story that appears in the Babylonian Talmud, because I believe that, especially for us post-modernity Jews raised to doubt the historicity of Jewish sacred texts, sometimes learning how our ancestors told our history has more medicinal power[1] than learning equally subjective history. The origin of the Septuagint, according to the Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Megillah:

"R. Judah said: When our teachers permitted Greek, they permitted it only for a scroll of the Torah'. This was on account of the incident related in connection with King Ptolemy, as it has been taught: 'It is related of **King Ptolemy that he brought together seventy-two elders and placed them in seventy-two [separate] rooms**, without telling them why he had brought them together, and he went in to each one of them and said to him, **Translate for me the Torah of Moses your master**. God then prompted each one of them and **they all conceived the same idea and wrote for him**."

In this Jewish version of how the Septuagint got written, the translation from Hebrew to Greek was both monarchical coercion and Divinely supported. Why would all of these God-prompted scholars conceive of this word, 'diaspora' in this particular verse?

Rebbe Wikipedia writes: "In Ancient Greece the term διασπορά (*diaspora*) hence meant "scattering" and was used to refer to citizens of a dominant city-state who emigrated to a conquered land with the purpose of colonization, to assimilate the territory into the empire."

[1] See, always, Aurora Levins Morales, "Historian as Curandera" http://www.auroralevinsmorales.com/uploads/4/2/9/2/4292077/the_historian_as_curandera.pdf

Translation Troubles.
JFR

I learned about the colonization and occupation of Palestine and the colonization and occupation that is North America at the same time. Book groups with comrades who weren't afraid to challenge each other; taking in truth-telling theater and music; long meetings trying to make connections between struggles here and there; longer walks around the lake with wise friends, digging up what we were taught, holding it up to the light of what we see around us now, turning the soil over and over again. This was a mind-blowing, heart-shattering, frame overturning time. I am still rebuilding my understanding of myself and my responsibilities in this world. Today, as a religious, anti-zionist Jew living as a white settler-colonizer in Philadelphia, I have nothing but questions about how to form a positive Jewish identity while taking seriously the responsibility to decolonize, here there and everywhere.

For a few years I've told people I am a diaspora-loving Jew. I felt that diaspora offered me this gorgeous inversion of the idea of exile. Rather than being thrown out of somewhere that we're trying to get back to, especially when the last hundred years of that "getting back" has taken the shape of the colonization of Palestine, we can claim diasporic-positive relationship to the places where we land. And yet, my diaspora here in the U.S., in the very same move, is the colonization of Indigenous people's lands. How can diaspora Jewish community understand decolonization? What does it mean to be in diaspora? In exile?

Rebbe Wikipedia teaches: "[The word diaspora] began to develop from this original sense when the Hebrew Bible was translated into Greek; the first mention of a diaspora created as a result of exile is found in the Septuagint, first in Deuteronomy 28:25 … translated to mean **"thou shalt be a dispersion in all kingdoms of the earth."** I pulled my Jewish Study Bible off the shelf and turned to Deuteronomy 28:25, where I found: "The Lord will put you to rout before your enemies; you shall march out against them by a single road, but flee from them by many roads; and **you shall become a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth**." With this footnote: "*You shall become a horror*: The Septuagint reads "you shall become a 'diaspora'" reinterpreting the Hebrew so as to reflect the historical circumstances of its 3rd century BCE Alexandrian authors." Wait. What?

Deuteronomy 28 is in the Torah portion *Ki Tavo* ('when you enter'). In it, Moses lays out of for the people how, after they enter and settle in Eretz Yisrael, they must obey the commandments. If they do this, many blessings. If the people do not obey the commandments and laws, they will be cursed.

Understanding this portion is made oh-so-complicated by how both the blessings and the curses circle around going into Eretz Yisrael, which the text claims is promised to the people and their descendants. There is much more to say about that. For the purposes of understanding our verse and the emergence of the word 'diaspora' in it, I want to understand this Biblical idea of being promised land as the idea of taking responsibility for the earth on which we live.

Dear One
Davey S.

A baby is coming, and who knows what to name it? She has a hundred ideas, none of them just right. She sucks on an apricot pit and samples the flavors of the names on her tongue.

Her own names are nothing special to her. Her parents call her Peggy, short for Margaret. The name says everything and nothing about the moment into which she was born: A post-war U.S. Jewish family with a GI bill house in a middle-class neighborhood; so drunk on assimilation that their children have only English names, so paralyzed in mourning that they have given up on naming children for the dead. Now, she goes by Gopi. She lives in an ashram in California, where she asked her guru for a name and this is the one he pulled out of the jar on his desk. It's an ordinary name, meaning "goatherd" in the guru's native Hindi. She likes it okay.

And hadn't she had another name? Mustn't they have called her something else, too? Hadn't she, once, had a name that fit truly, that reverberated in her soul?

As a child she shared a bedroom with her grandmother, whom she called Grandma Jenny. Jenny's first name was Shayna, so in English they said Jenny. For ten years Peggy and Jenny shared a bedroom, but they didn't share a language. The child, azoy kluge, could already read and write English, but she didn't know Yiddish. Jenny could not read or write at all, and didn't speak English – at least not to Jews, who she thought should understand Yiddish, and if they didn't why should it be her problem?

Peggy's parents used Yiddish to speak of tragedy, or of scandal - when they wanted the children not to understand. Redt Yiddish, they said, di kinder zoln nisht farshtein, and she understood only that they were keeping something from her. They spoke English when they wanted Jenny not to understand. Speak English, they said, the chicken's not kosher, but don't mention it, it's not as if she can read the label.

Didn't Jenny call her something? If not a name perhaps a word, an endearment? Something in her own language to call the toddler she cared for every workday, the school girl who slept every night within arm's reach? Or perhaps she just called her "kind," child. Azoy kleine kind, azoy ruike kind, azoy troierike kind. What else do you say of a child with no name, who talks back, when she talks at all, in this liar's tongue?

Grown now, having picked up a few names in the meanwhile, she sits in the window seat, nibbling pastry in the early morning cool. She's too pregnant to drive, so a friend has gone to her favorite bakery and brought her back one of everything. The baby likes sweets, or that's what she tells herself when it stops kicking long enough to let her savor the buttery treats. Words and sounds churn within her and occasionally find form on her lips. She keeps hoping a name will emerge. But the sounds are unfamiliar, the words in no language she knows.

My mother tells the story of my name a different way - actually, several different ways. Her storytelling, like my Bubba's and maybe Jenny's too, is haphazard. Tidbits slip out occasionally. One is that she searched long and hard for a name that was both Hindi and Jewish. It had to be Jewish so that her parents wouldn't disown her, and it had to be Hindi so the guru wouldn't take offense. For months she paged through inadequate American baby name books in search of one that was both.

And then there's the part where they were expecting a boy. The midwife held a crystal over my mother's belly and predicted the baby would be male. When I was born, the midwife was only a little embarrassed to announce that I was female. My mother had only looked for boy's names. After I arrived, the searching and negotiating started all over again. It went on for almost six months.

And what to call the baby in the meanwhile? The sounds that bubbled within my mother emerged as animal names and nonsense words. For six months my parents called me monkey, or mush-mouse, or "the baby," and that worked okay. Eventually they settled on Gita Jenifer. Gita, the only girl's name my mother could find that was both Hindi ("song") and Jewish ("good," from the Yiddish/Slavic), and Jenifer after her grandma Jenny. She didn't know that Jenny was just an English substitute for Shayna, not short for Jenifer at all.

At 19 I too asked for a new name and got one, almost as randomly as my mother had gotten hers. I ended up being called Davey, and since I was beginning to realize that the midwife had been right, or wrong, and I was sort of a boy after all, that worked out pretty well.

But didn't I have another name, once? Didn't my mother spend months listening to the words and sounds that burbling through her mottled memory, searching for a boy's name that the baby wouldn't kick at? Wasn't there, once, a name that fit me truly, that reverberated in my soul?

A few years ago I confessed to my then-lover that I might need a new name soon, that I've never been particularly attached to Davey. She decided she couldn't call me a name that didn't feel true to me, and so stopped calling me by my name at all. Instead she called me tayerer, dear one. She had been teaching me Yiddish, so it made sense. We both learned our Yiddish as adults, and I delighted in re/learning words I could vaguely remember having heard older relatives say. I craved and magnified the feeling of familiarity, attaching comfort and nostalgia to words I had just learned for the first time, or maybe not the first. It was all the sweeter to be called tayerer, to be embraced in this newly familiar tongue. And besides, what else do you call someone with no name.

I am sitting on the porch enjoying the afternoon sun, my lips and fingers stained red with cherry juice. Two pits, long sucked clean of flesh, click against each other in my mouth as I stir them with my tongue. I am six years older than my mother was then.

Words and sounds swarm in my guts. As I inhale they bubble upward and expand in my chest. A few surge through my throat, find shape in my mouth. The sounds are familiar but I pronounce them clumsily. The words tease me from just beyond the edge of my comprehension. I almost have it – a name that feels just right, here and now. A name that makes sense in all my languages and all my communities. A name that reverberates in the ever-changing soul of an English-speaking, Yiddish-loving, geographically mobile and hella queer Jew. It might not be the name that spoke to my mother before I was born, and it might not fit me forever. But for today … it's right there. I can almost say it.